



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

Administrative Office
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Bldg. 1, Room E-316
Charleston, West Virginia 25305
(304) 340-2305 Jennifer Bundy
(304) 340-2306 April Harless
(304) 558-4219 / TTY
(304) 558-1212 / FAX
Web Site: www.courtswv.gov
Twitter: [WVCourts](https://twitter.com/WVCourts)
Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/courtswv/
Email: Jennifer.Bundy@courtswv.gov
Email: April.Harless@courtswv.gov

E-filing off to good start in Monroe County

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UNION, W.Va. – Judge Robert A. Irons was so eager to show how well e-filing has been working in Monroe County that on Tuesday he demonstrated that he can pull up orders on his smart phone, allowing him to work no matter where he is.

“I’m really excited about this technology. It’s going to save a lot of money, it’s going to make the work flow more efficiently, and it’s just going to be better all the way around,” said Judge Irons, the only judge in the Thirty-First Judicial Circuit (Monroe and Summers Counties). “When you look at the work flow now, when you think of all those steps eliminated, all those pieces of paper and postage eliminated, it’s really a huge savings.

“There are literally cases in every circuit clerk’s office that you can’t tell what is going on in the case because it doesn’t contain the orders. This will help alleviate that. And to the extent we use technology to create templates to generate orders more accurately and more quickly, it’s going to help everyone,” Judge Irons said.

About thirty people attended a press conference on Tuesday, July 21, in the Circuit Courtroom in the Monroe County Courthouse in Union to demonstrate how the West Virginia Judiciary’s Unified Electronic Filing System works.

Monroe County is the third county to establish e-filing for circuit court documents. Since May 19, 12 civil cases have been e-filed there.

“Only a handful of states have gone fully to e-filing. We are at the front end of this nationally,” Supreme Court Justice Brent D. Benjamin said during the ceremony.

“I’m just thrilled to be a part of it, to be on the front end of it, have some input on the final product,” said Monroe County Circuit Clerk Leta Gullette-Comer. “It has been a lot of work on me and my staff, but I think it will all be worth it in the end.”

Some lawyers are hesitant about e-filing but are emboldened to use it when they find out that Judge Irons wants them to, she said. Once they have e-filed their first document, they realize how easy it is.

“I can see where it will increase not only the efficiency, but also the accuracy of our records,” she said.

Justice Benjamin said, “It adds certainty and predictability to the filing process and gives lawyers and litigants more flexibility as well as judges. E-filing is a way of the

future. It not only saves clients and litigants but it saves tax payers. All those boxes of paper take up a lot of space in the courthouse. Electronic records do not, and that is an important thing.

“For those who are filing, you don’t have to pay your attorney now to drive to courthouse anymore. You can do it from your office or even home,” Justice Benjamin said.

Matt Arrowood, Director of Circuit Clerk Services for the Supreme Court Administrative Office, oversees the statewide e-filing project. “Monroe is a great representation of West Virginia. They are small, they are rural, but they have a lot of great people willing to accept new things and new ideas,” he said. “We learn from each county and gain support from attorneys and judicial staff, and we can use that as we move forward into other counties.”

The e-filing system was established through amendments to the West Virginia Trial Court Rules, effective May 1, 2014. The rules incorporated a pilot project that began in August 2013 when Marion County became the first county to have electronic filing of circuit court records. Jefferson County began accepting electronically filed documents in April 2015.

Anyone who wants to file a case in a circuit court in those counties – or eventually in any circuit clerk’s office when the project is expanded statewide – will be able to file documents electronically themselves. If they so choose, self-represented litigants may give paper documents to clerk’s office staff member to scan and file. Confidential documents will be electronic but will remain confidential.

Public documents that have been scanned from previous years as well as those filed every day at circuit clerks’ offices will be available online in a PDF format. Any file available to the public in circuit clerks’ offices eventually will be available from any computer anywhere.

A committee is studying the cost of the new system and will determine what a reasonable filing fee and user fee should be once the system is expanded statewide. The system will be paid for by the users, not by taxpayers.

The Supreme Court is paying for the upgrade in technology in all circuit clerks’ offices.

E-filing is used in circuit courts only. The unified judicial application (UJA) serves magistrate courts. The two systems currently are running parallel. Once both are operational in every county, the systems will communicate and will make the transition of case information between magistrate and circuit clerks offices seamless.

Currently, the UJA is operating in 40 magistrate courts and new locations are converted every six weeks. The UJA LEO (Case Search & Active Warrant Search) is already operational statewide and provides law enforcement and 911 dispatch centers instant access to magistrate court records and outstanding warrants.